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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ASHGABAT 001058

SIPDIS

STATE FOR SCA/CEN

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SUBJECT: VISIT OF GENERAL PETRAEUS TO TURKMENISTAN

Classified By: Charge Richard Miles, Reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

11. (C) SUMMARY. On August 15, CENTCOM Commander General Petraeus visited Ashgabat for meetings with Turkmen government officials. The General met with the Minister of Defense, the Chief of the State Border Service, and the Deputy Chairman for Foreign Relations and Foreign Minister. Discussions covered the usual overflight issue, Northern Distribution Network (NDN), and updates to the Turkmen on the situation in Afghanistan and Pakistan. The meetings were cordial, and fairly positive in tone. END SUMMARY.

MINISTRY OF DEFENSE

12. (C) General Petraeus met with Minister of Defense Colonel Yaylym Berdiyev. This was Berdiyev's first meeting with Petraeus, since he was named Minister of Defense shortly after Petraeus' previous visit. Berdiyev stuck close to his talking points, in which he praised the level of U.S.-Turkmen cooperation. He reiterated support for the CENTCOM funded border posts, the third of which will open next month. Berdiyev spoke favorably about the military to military contact plan as an excellent vehicle for U.S.-Turkmen cooperation.

13. (C) In addition to providing an update on the situation in Afghanistan and Pakistan, General Petraeus extended an invitation for Turkmenistan to send a representative to Tampa as a CENTCOM liaison officer. This officer would have direct access to current information on Afghanistan, better direct interface between the Turkmen MOD and CENTCOM, and exposure to officers from dozens of other countries. The General also extended an invitation for participation in the CENTCOM Commander's fellowship at the George C. Marshall Center, a six month or one year program for a Turkmen officer. Both the liaison officer and fellowship opportunity would provide Turkmen officers the chance to work with officers from the U.S. and other countries, and would make such Turkmen officers an asset to the Turkmen military. The General also offered to assist in training special operations forces. Berdiyev did not respond to these offers directly, but said that based on the success of our partnership on new border crossing points, they will consider General Petraeus proposals. Berdiyev also provided no response when General Petraeus suggested the possibility of future Turkmen policy

changes in permitting nonlethals to cross Turkmenistan to Turkey as part of NDN.

STATE BORDER SERVICE

14. (C) At his meeting with General Petraeus, Chairman Myrat Islamov of the State Border Service (SBS) praised the U.S. constructed border posts, as well as the good relations between the SBS and the U.S. Embassy. They discussed the security situation in Afghanistan, an area of obvious interest to Islamov who is responsible for securing the Turkmen-Afghan border. Islamov assured General Petraeus that the Turkmen border is secure, and reminded the General that Turkmenistan is not a transit country for narcotics. (Comment: This is a steady refrain from Turkmen officials, unlikely as it might be. End Comment.) Interestingly, though, when General Petraeus mentioned that U.S. forces in Afghanistan were more than doubling in number this year, Islamov commented favorably, saying it was good news and made their job easier. Islamov also passed on that President Berdimuhamedov was very interested in strengthening the Turkmen border, referring to his attendance at the recent opening of a border post in celebration of the day dedicated to Turkmen Border Forces, August 11th. The General offered to assist the SBS with training of a special operations capability, citing the possibility that Turkmenistan would have to defend its borders against terrorism, extremism, and narcotics.

MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS

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15. (C) The last meeting of the short visit was with Deputy Chairman for Foreign Relations and Foreign Minister Rashid Meredov. As in the previous meetings, the General made his pitch for the CENTCOM Liaison Officer idea plus the CENTCOM Marshall Center fellowships. Petraeus touched on the need for more flights under the annual agreement and made the expected request for NDN -- getting no response on the former and the expected response on the latter. The General suggested that he could send a local procurement team to Turkmenistan to see what construction materials and other goods and supplies might be sourced in Turkmenistan and shipped to Afghanistan directly -- sort of a mini-NDN. Meredov did not respond to that idea. General Petraeus let Meredov know that the U.S. was working on sending the radios requested as part of the ongoing overflight discussions. (Comment: Turkmen Civil Aviation officials requested several radios as part of the discussions on overflight limits and the bill for air navigation presented in January. End Comment.)

16. (C) In the Embassy briefing for the General, Charge described the work we are doing to set up a forum for bilateral discussion of the various issues on the agenda, including security issues. Charge informed the General that we had not thought through what might be included under security issues and that we needed to stay in touch with CENTCOM as our ideas developed. The General agreed that we needed to do that.

17. (C) COMMENT: While there were no breakthroughs on the Northern Distribution Network or on overflight resolution, frankly none were expected during this visit. The Defense Attache will follow up on the opportunities for Turkmen participation on the CENTCOM fellowship and the liaison officer to CENTCOM headquarters in Tampa. While nothing much new came from the visit, it did serve to maintain the military to military relationship, and keep open lines of communication on topics such as overflight and U.S. efforts to convince Turkmenistan to participate in the Northern Distribution Network. The atmospherics in all meetings were friendly and positive, although -- no surprise here -- lacking in substantive response from the Turkmen side. END COMMENT.

18. (U) CENTCOM has cleared this message.
MILES